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Moving from a continuum to a community: reconceptualising the provision of support

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Abstract

The notion of the continuum is applied to special education in diverse contexts across many nations. This paper explores its conceptual underpinnings, drawing upon a systematic search of the literature to review recurring ideas associated with the notion and to explicate both its uses and short-comings. Through a thematic analysis of the literature the research team derived twenty-nine continua, situated within six broad groupings (space, students, staffing, support, strategies and systems). This provides a clear structure for reconsidering the issues which the notion of the continuum is supposed to describe and enables a reconceptualisation of how the delivery of services is represented. We present the initial underpinnings for a community of provision, in which settings and services work together to provide learning and support for all children and young people in their locality.

Keywords – Continuum: additional provision: support services: special education:
community of provision

Moving from a Continuum to a Community – Reconceptualising the Provision of Support

The provision of education for children identified with special educational needs creates a range of questions related to governance, curriculum, detection and placement (Norwich, 2008). The response to these questions varies across and within countries. Frequently the possibilities are framed as being upon a continuum. Children and young people are positioned upon a continuum of need (e.g. Martin, 2009), supported within a continuum of provision (e.g. Lynch, 2007) and by a continuum of services (e.g. DeLorenzo, 2008). As a consequence national debates are framed around legislative approaches which will provide the institutional flexibility associated with a continuum of settings and services (Richardson & Powell, 2011). Within Ireland, for example, it is suggested that a continuum of services supports students identified upon a continuum of need (NEPS, 2007; NEPS, 2010) in conjunction with a continuum of provision which includes special schools, special classes within mainstream and supported integrated placement (Shevlin, 2002).

Taylor (1988, 2001) suggested, however, that the notion of the continuum had fallen into disrepute. He considered that it gives legitimacy to restrictive environments and denial of human rights, prioritises professional decision-making, assumes people need to be ready for mainstream participation, links intensity with segregation and shifts the focus away from redeveloping mainstream provision. He recognised, however, that it still underpins people's conceptualisation of services, and feeds restrictive provision which works against self-determination, integration and independence and focuses upon the extremes of need. He noted that new approaches just become additional slots, when what is needed is a reconceptualisation of services and supports. Nisbet (2004) echoed this, pointing out that despite changes in policies and practices the notion

remained embedded within financial structures and financial incentives which maintain restrictive settings, and that whilst some people have been moved into the mainstream, new groups were being identified for exclusion. She suggested the need for new paradigms to frame our developing understanding. These should draw upon a recognition of human diversity, and be driven by notions such as self advocacy, self-determination, general education, community inclusion, consumer-directed services, and universal design.

This article synthesises key theoretical concepts which underpin notions of the continuum of provision and continuum of services and outlines the reconceptualisation of provision which emerged. This synthesis and reconceptualisation were produced as part of a research project for the National Council for Special Education in Ireland. This aimed to create a descriptive map of international research which explores the notion of the continuum of education provision for children with special educational needs. The initial task was to identify the underlying characteristics of the continuum and subsequently develop a common framework for considering practice across nations.

Identifying and Describing Sources for the Literature Review

This review used systematic protocols for searching databases and identifying relevant academic literature related to concepts of the continuum in order to answer the question:

How have the continuum of provision and the continuum of services in relation to special educational needs been conceptualised in the literature?

Given the research timeframe and breadth of available online sources it was deemed appropriate to focus our search upon electronically available material. However, given the nature of the question and the long history associated with this concept no time limit was placed upon publication date. An electronic search of databases, citation indexes and internet sites

identified academic articles related to continua in an educational context. This first part of the review process was to map out the sources which are relevant to this topic. This search was conducted in between 17-21st January 2011 (see Table 1). These searches used keyword terms drawn from the educational terminology of different countries and from the British Education Thesaurus. They sought the term Continuum in relation to special education/inclusive ed/additional support/additional educational needs using 51 identified terms (see Table 2).

The Citations were divided and placed in four files to be independently screened in a two stage process. At stage 1 they were screened on the basis of their titles and abstracts. This screening was undertaken by four members of the research team working in pairs. This involved the application of the following inclusion/exclusion criteria which defined the scope of the review (see Table 3).

The inclusion or reason for exclusion was recorded for each source within copies of the four data files (see Table 4). Each pairing of reviewers then met to discuss and moderate their findings. They compared the first 100 pairings, accepting the lowest exclusion criterion from the list when different exclusion criteria had been applied and if they were the frequent criteria (1, 2 & 4). However it was agreed to double check whenever there was a rare exclusion criterion (3, 5, 6, 7 & 8). All those where there was an original disagreement about inclusion were discussed and if there was not enough information to include or exclude, the material was always included. Final decisions were collated within a new data file. 7 duplicates were also removed at this stage.

After the Stage 1 it was recognised that many papers which were included were describing policy and not reflecting upon the concept of the continuum. It was recognised that the policy descriptions may offer implicit insights into the notion of the continuum but we sought

explicit reflections upon the notion. Two additional sets of Inclusion groupings were therefore identified (See Table 5). We rescreened all those which had been previously included, using the same quality assurance processes.

A final 65 papers defined as *Theory* (see Table 5) were now divided between four members of the research team for data extraction. Three members of the team were allocated 27 of the papers and the one member who would write the synthesis was allocated the other 38. Prior to beginning the data extraction the research team identified six papers (Booth, 1994; Fuchs, Fuchs, & Stecker, 2010; Nisbet, 2004; Norwich, 2008; Taylor, 1988; Taylor, 2001) which could serve as a baseline for our discussion of the conceptualisation of the continuum. These papers were identified by each pair of reviewers following stage 1 screening. Consequently, three papers came from Files 1 & 2, and three papers came from Files 3&4. The papers were recommended by the pairs on the basis that at this early stage they appeared to have a strong focus upon the continuum concept as opposed to some papers which seemed to offer a less extensive examination. Each of these papers was reviewed by all the researchers adding to their allocation as necessary. The data identified and extracted from these 6 papers by the researchers played an equivalent role to data from the other 59 papers within the emerging conceptual and categorical framework. Sharing these papers across each reviewer's data extraction provided a collective point of reference for subsequent examination of the kinds of concepts to which each researcher had been alert and supported the coherence of our analysis.

Each of the 65 papers was assessed for relevance in relation to the inclusion criteria and the overarching question. Given the nature of the research question it was not felt necessary to give a weighting to the body of evidence provided by the data. At the outset the team was aware that the majority of documents came from the United States; that a wide range of special

educational needs was identified; and that all age ranges and setting types were discussed.

However, the research team did not concern itself with collating information about the population to whom the paper might refer, nor its country of origin, nor its specific field in relation to special educational needs. Gathering this data was deemed to be superfluous to answering the question upon which the review focused. Those parts of the document which were appropriate, coherent and relevant to the notion of the continuum were extracted and placed within their four separate files. A further two papers were excluded once data extraction itself had started, being reclassified as Policy (see Table 5). This resulted in 63 papers in the final synthesis (see Table 6).

The overall research project of which this review was the first part was to involve four stages of data collection; this conceptual review, an analysis of international reports, a survey and vignette study, and case study visits. The four stages of data collection and their synthesis were to be underpinned by thematic analysis derived from grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) with questions and conceptualisations emerging from the previous phases informing the next phase of research. In this first phase, it was recognised that the corpus of literature would come from a wide variety of contexts and that the issues raised would be highly complex and frequently contested, and that this would present a considerable challenge to such a synthesis. However, it was anticipated that such complexity would be best served by an inductive analysis, which involved an emergent coding of the data without trying to fit it into pre-existing codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006), but recognised that as with a synthesis of qualitative research (Campbell, Pound, Pope, Britten, Pill, Morgan & Donovan, 2003) a synthesis of theoretical conceptualisations should seek a level of conceptual development beyond the level evidenced within the individual papers.

The researcher who was to write the synthesis drew upon the data selected by himself and one other researcher. He identified concepts as they emerged from the data within 46 of the papers (from File 3 & 4), breaking down the data into discrete parts so that it could be closely examined and compared for differences and similarities. As the concepts built up, the researcher cross-referenced them, looking for relevant links between phenomena, creating categories which provided overarching themes for the conceptualisation of the continuum. Subsequent to this process, to provide quality assurance, the two other researchers who had independently examined the other two files (Files 1 & 2) then assessed the relevance of the categories to the concepts they had identified within the data. They then allocated the concept they had identified to the appropriate categories. The synthesis was then produced on the basis of these agreed categories drawing upon the concepts and extracts to evidence and explicate the notion of the continuum within the literature.

The Continuum within the Literature

All in all 194 concepts were noted which the research team associated with the notion of the continuum, 26 of these involving visual representations. Six categories were identified that unified the concepts evident in the extracts taken from the literature (see Table 7).

What is on the Continuum

From the earliest examples in the 1960s and 1970s, a linear notion of a continuum of settings has been in evidence (Amond, 1987a &b; Aloia in National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) 1998; Deno 1970; IN IPS, 1975; Pysh &Chalfant 1978; Reynolds, 1962; Sargent, 1981). Initially, models aimed to represent provision as it was,

but the use of the continuum became an aspirational notion. This continuum typically went from residential to special school to special unit to special class to support in an ordinary class to no support, with attendance in each space on a full-time or part-time basis (Norwich, 2008). Even though the underlying principle of this linear continuum has been the same, the language used and some of the understandings of process have varied. The continuum has been represented as a program or as a series of programs, (eg: Adelman, 1989; Barresi, 1980; Pysh & Chalfant, 1978; Sargent, 1981) identified by space and personnel, with assessment and diagnosis typically identified as the means of facilitating movement between them (MSDE, 1969). In addition, in the earliest models, the residential provision would have been framed as being non-educational, but succumbed to an increasing emphasis on minimising the separation of pupils (Taylor, 1988). It has now reached a point in which many discuss a blurring between mainstream and special provision, with the continuum of placement being less of a focus than a continuum of response (Fuchs et al. 2010; Gentry, 2009).

The continuum has been seen to include private provision (Education and Skills Committee, 2006; Jones et al., 2008) but needs to provide neighbourhood schooling for all (Idol, 1997). It has frequently been applied to a range of services rather than just educational placement, encapsulating not only a wider notion of care but also a spread of individual needs to be catered for (e.g. Gifted and talented to special educational needs - Doyle, 2001). This continuum of care can be seen to begin in everyday settings, with practitioners alert to possible needs, then providing support to other practitioners and families, before engaging in multi-agency responses and intensive individual support (Allison, Gillilan, Mayhew & Wilson, 2007). It can also be positioned at a policy level however, with a combination of school and community programs and services operating at different social policy levels and at group or individual

levels. They can operate as preventative, targetted or individual approaches, aiming to be interconnected to meet the needs of all children (Center for Mental Health in Schools (CfMHiS) 2004; Taylor, 2001).

The range of identified services across the literature is extensive (Grotzky 1978; NASDSE, 1998; Taylor, 1988), covering health, educational and social care, each of which varies in the nature of its provision according to local practices and providers (Barresi, 1980). It is perhaps unsurprising that it is described as a ‘long line that keeps going’ (beginning with positive role models) (South Carolina Continuum of Care for Emotionally Disturbed Children, 1992) and yet ironically that some administrators should perceive it to be made up of categorical parts (Doyle, 2001). There is an equally extensive range of practitioners, aiming to provide support at all relevant points in a child’s life and potentially across their life time (Amond, 1986). A common element which frames their practice is the definition of the continuum according to the intensity of provision these practitioners provide (Barnett, Van Der Hayden & Witt, 2007). This can either be intensity in relation to amount of intervention experienced or support provided, frequently representing a level of response to the perceived, defined or assessed severity of need (Barresi, 1980; Beam & Breshears, 1985; Copeland, 2000; Pysh & Chalfant, 1978).

A further defining feature of some descriptions of the continuum is the presence of support staff and their role in relation to other teachers and the students, as is the nature and intensity of the support provided to staff (Haegele & Kozub, 2010). There is also a recognised spread of practitioner responses which includes interpreting behaviours differently and adopting different approaches as a result of training or working contexts and different theoretical perspectives on learning and teaching (Mercer, Lane, Jordan, Allsop, & Eisele, 1996). This

spread involves a range of teaching practices including the nature of instruction and focus of activities as well as the level of their assistance. This raises interesting questions for different approaches to teaching and learning within the spread of settings discussed earlier.

The significance of context is also particularly relevant to movement within the systems. Transitions between everyday events and larger changes can be seen as part of a continuum (Newcomb & Cousert, 1996) but is also evident in many graphic representations of continua. Most representations include a line with arrows at the end, representing the scope of an attribute within the continuum and also movement across it. The intention of the arrow is to suggest flexible movement within a continuum; however, often there is more than one arrow and because no movement is possible on one (e.g. assessed severity of need - Special Education Instructional Materials Center (SEIMC), 1979) it means no movement can occur on the other. Some also point in one direction only (eg Reynolds & Birch, 1977). In other instances the arrow represents a shifting emphasis upon an aspect of the provision (e.g. intensity or restrictiveness of provision - Taylor, 1988). In other representations a lack of arrows might be seen to encapsulate a lack of movement and inward looking ‘silo’ thinking (eg Maryland State Department of Education, 1969).

Movement within the continuum does not require movement across separated spaces and places. It can be contained within a single setting (CfMHiS, 2004). This last model reflects a continuum of variables, such as staff numbers and commitment to school values, which are recognised to have a direct impact upon the capacities of a setting (IN IPS, 1975). Other variables include which part of the continuum is emphasised (e.g. the mainstream) or which points of transition are emphasised within policy and practice (Doyle, 2001). They can also include the spread of resources, dependent upon varying degrees of rarity, cost, accessibility and

technical nature (Hallenbeck, Kauffman & Lloyd, 1993; Murdick, 1998; Sargent, 1981).

However, even if in recent representations the mainstream is the dominant location (Reschly, 2005 in Kavale & Spaulding, 2008) traditionally few services are available in the mainstream situation (Kamin, 2001).

The breadth of components and issues for concern suggested by the spread of continua described above brings a spread of regulations about how the parts are arranged and managed, and the nature of roles within them (Ohio State Dept of Education, 1982). These regulations have to enable dynamic and accessible structures with participation at many levels, allowing for due process, reducing reliance upon categories of impairment (Caster & Grimes, 1974). For many they have to be about identifying and addressing skills and gaps in capacity, and not based upon theories or economic priorities (Bercow, 2010). This provides a continuum of practical priorities for analysing and developing policy.

How We Think About Provision on the Continuum

The continuum has long been sought as the necessary response to student need (Zigmond & Baker, 1996), but it also represents efficient and effective support service delivery (Herman, Merrell, Reinke & Tucker, 2004) reflecting the dominant cultural view. The continuum as a concept has not resulted in new ways of doing things. It has re-presented ways of thinking that existed before under a different name (Reynolds, 1962). However, it also re-emerges when new models of support are developed (Walker et al., 1996 cited in Brown & Michaels, 2006), arising from the way in which people apply linear progression to those new models (Brown & Michaels, 2006).

The point at which any of the continua identified above starts will by necessity produce different responses to situations, with and from children, practitioners, administrators and policy

makers. It changes the direction in which people are looking and the manner in which they look (Taylor, 1988). How we view the children is affected too (e.g. Yell, 1995). For example, our view can prioritise needs which systems are set up to assess or can create perceptions around the value of certain types of relationships or can suggest that expertise and resources reside in one sector rather than another (e.g. NASDSE, 1998; Reynolds & Birch, 1977).

It is clear that, for many, the continuum is based upon technical rationality; the belief that to become a professional one must acquire generalized, systematic, theoretical or scientific knowledge; which gives superior status to the individual who has ownership of that knowledge and even greater status to those who research and deepen that knowledge (Schön, 1983). A belief in experts conducting assessment underlies many of the continua (e.g. Block, 1996), as does a belief in a professional engagement in evidence-gathering or the outputs of research (e.g. Allison, Gilliland, Mayhew and Wilson, 2007) and specialists operating as consultants (Gallagher, 2001). The emphasis upon more training is widely in evidence too (Gallagher, 2001).

The ways in which a particular continuum is understood can also have an impact. For example, is a particular continuum a means of organising people amongst services or is it to accomplish different kinds of learning or to achieve equity or to achieve socialisation (Renzulli, 2002)? The continua can represent quite different theoretical positions (e.g. behaviorist to naturalistic - Dockrell and Messer, 1999). It is possible to represent them as a continuum of values and philosophies, too (Amond, 1987; Vaughn and Schumm, 1995). These contrasting values and philosophies may lead to the view that special and mainstream are starkly different both in practice and conceptually (NASDSE, 1998). It can put different parts of continua in

competition with each other, perhaps fighting to maintain some aspect over another (Coalition on School Inclusion, 1994; Doyle, 2001).

These tensions are not helped by models of the continuum which situate specialist knowledge in certain parts of the different continua (Taylor, 1988). For example, the continuum of settings can be seen to put both ends of the continuum on the defensive; it can position mainstream as a source of failure and special as a place of failures (ICOSI, 1994). Despite its existence and an individual's placement upon it being influenced by a range of social factors (Robertson & Bates, 1998), it might suggest that there is a right place for everybody (Amond, 1987a; Deno, 1970; Vaughn and Schumm, 1995), and that this right place can be identified through assessment (Madden and Slavin, 1983 cited in Fuchs and Fuchs, 1995). It could imply that not everybody is welcome or safe at every point across the continua (Robertson & Bates, 1998), that some segregation is necessary (Bliton & Schroeder, 1986) and that different levels of intensity of provision cannot be provided generally (Taylor, 1998). It can create spaces which have to be filled. It might imply too that particular types of practice (Vaughn and Schumm, 1995) and the need for them can be defined by a type of setting or type of child (Madden and Slavin, 1983 cited in Fuchs and Fuchs, 1995), and that this can be delivered equally across districts and regions (Bercow, 2008; Yell, 1995). However, people's experiences, ambitions or desires may contradict such underlying assumptions.

The contradictions and tensions inherent within the thinking which creates and emerges from the notion of the continuum, perhaps unsurprisingly, result in calls to bring together different ways of viewing the processes within the continuum and to remove the barriers which exist between the parts (Fuchs et al., 2010; Renzulli, 2002; Van Der Heyden, Witt, & Barnett in Dupuis 2010).

Aims for the Continuum

Given the wide usage of the notion of the continuum the number of sources which explored its aims was surprisingly few (4). It was seen as a way to avoid stigma (Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), 1969), whilst increasing independence and participation (Corthell, 1984). It was a tool for movement as a child's difficulties were remediated, so that whilst the aim was to keep them in the mainstream, there was a solution for challenges that cannot be dealt with in regular classes (Hendrickson, Smith and Frank, 1998; Kamin and Berger, 2001). It was also seen as a means to maximise use of specialised staff, provide flexible individual support and reduce costs and the need for separate services (Corthell, 1984; MSDE, 1969). The three broad aims would therefore seem to be: to impact on the individual students; provide a focus upon inclusion in the mainstream; deliver effective use of resources.

Why there must be Working Together

As mentioned above, a consistent theme in the literature is for the different parts of the continuum to work together. More recent models have begun to represent the continuum as a collective response rather than a linear process (NASDSE, 1998). These see provision as being around the child or family, positioning the child as the focus of the services. The underlying message is that an effective continuum needs a spread of services and levels of services (Gentry, 2009; Renzulli, 1984). These need to be nested within each other (Sugai, 2003) and interconnected (Adelman & Taylor, 2001), including multiple public and private providers using comprehensive community and school-based programmes. The aspiration is to create a cohesive system of prevention, intervention and care, which is as non-intrusive as possible, involving shared responsibility, shared expertise, collaborative planning and delivery and effective

communication to join up the parts (Amond, 1987; CfMHiS, 2004; Hunter & O-Connor, 2006; Los Angeles Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2000; NASDSE, 1998). This continuum can be locally owned and co-operatively developed (IN IPS, 1975;) reducing pressure upon specialist tiers (Allison et al., 2007). To work effectively it must overcome environmental and systemic challenges which resist the reform (Motes, 1998), restructuring and transformation of policy, practice and outcomes (CfMHiS, 2004).

How Children are Placed on the Continuum

The underlying premise is that each case needs to be reviewed individually to place a child appropriately on the continuum (Ohio State Legislative Office of Education, 1995), despite the aim to keep them at the most included end (Amond, 1986) It was noted that appropriate placements cannot be generalised (Jones et al., 2008). There were suggestions that decisions should be made on the basis of social and academic outcomes and instructional practices and be accountable to the pupil (Vaughn & Schumm, 1995). But in seeming contrast, the importance of categories for placement was also highlighted (Doyle, 2001), as was the role of scientific evidence (Kavale & Spaulding, 2008), test scores (SEIMC, 1979), and the notion of developmental appropriacy (Beam & Breshears, 1985). Placement could therefore be defined by age and category of impairment (Kamin & Berger, 2001), reflecting discrete embodied differences between types of ‘conditions’ (Gallagher, 2001) and a person’s demonstration of skills a particular point in time (Taylor, 1988). The concern was of bias within the continuum, where formal processes and resource availability governed placement (Amond, 1986; Bliton & Schroeder, 1986; NASDSE, 1998) and students had to prove that movement was justified (Taylor, 1988).

Challenges for the Continuum

Despite the aim to deliver provision on the basis of assessment of need, it seems that the effectiveness of the continuum is context dependent and lacks a robust evidence base about the nature of provision, its practices and underpinning theory. Evidence is not readily transferrable within and across continua either, as the continuum is dependent upon local availability of resources, involving staff who may not have relevant training or experience or shared understandings (Jindal-Snape, Douglas, Topping, Kerr & Smith, 2005). Given the earlier discussion of the continuum as a spread of philosophies and values, we would also suggest that what is regarded to be evidence will also vary between individuals and between services.

As a system the continuum can be focussed more upon the diagnosis than the effectiveness of teaching methods (NASDSE, 1998). The underlying premise that provision can be matched to need has been challenged (Amond, 1986; Brown & Michaels, 2006), as has the notion that it can only be provided in a particular location (Booth, 1994), even if this is an artificial link (Amond, 1986). The notion of choice of service and setting, particularly parental choice, within such a system has also been questioned, as choice is dependent upon diagnosis which in turn is dependent upon severity. Therefore, it is only choice for those with an assessment of comparatively extreme need. It is noted too that choice is typically linked to separation (Booth, 1994), even though level of intensity is not synonymous with level of segregation (McLean & Hanline, 1990; Taylor, 1988). Within most conceptualisations of the continuum, inclusion can only be an option within the whole rather than a characteristic of the whole (Amond, 1986; Idol, 1997) Therefore, even if these continua seek to be effective they do not represent universal inclusion within the mainstream.

The solution to the challenges of placement is the capacity to move; however, movement along the continuum is reported to be rare. Once a place has been achieved it is maintained, potentially trapping people at a particular point, within a particular setting, within particular programmes, at a particular level (Jindal-Snape et al., 2005; Snell, 2006 in Brown & Michaels, 2006). The need to prepare people for the next step along the continuum is highlighted (Bliton & Schroeder, 1986); otherwise, formal processes deliver benign or harmful outcomes (Taylor, 1988; McLean & Hanline, 1990), though establishing achievable criteria for movement is problematic (Pysh & Chalfant, 1978).

It is recognized that the full continuum cannot be provided at a local level unless population numbers are very high and all services are centralised (Amond, 1986). As a consequence the continuum is rarely fully available, tends to be fragmented (CfMHIS, 2004) and cannot operate in a socially inclusive manner (Booth, 1994). This is reinforced by inherent assumptions within many continua that some people or provision require segregation (Bliton & Schroeder, 1986) and that the continua represent a linear movement towards a norm - assumptions which the existence of the concept of the continuum legitimizes (Amond, 1986). In addition, recognising one end of the continuum as inclusive or least restrictive does not stop the provision from being exclusionary or restrictive (Taylor, 1988; McLean & Hanline, 1990), and recognising another end as special does not mean that it is doing anything that is special or different from that which is done elsewhere. It also encourages a view that each identified need requires its own service or programme into which the individual can be positioned (NASDSE, 1998), which does not encourage recognition of the universal challenges created by systems and process (CfMHIS, 2004).

There is evidence from the 1980's onwards that the continuum has to include more than outreach services or the co-ordination of schools and resource centres (Amond, 1986). It has been recognised that there needs to be a shift in concepts, values, processes and outcomes, challenging funding, resourcing, leadership and established roles (NASDSE, 1998). Yet the systemic changes called for (Kamin & Berger, 2001) have not materialised as expected (Allison et al., 2007).

It would seem that many of the challenges identified over 30 years ago by Barresi and colleagues (1980) as needing further research are as pertinent today. Though many have been researched they remain largely unresolved. Barresi and colleagues highlighted the need to explore flexibility, availability and accessibility of all types of services and programs for all and their capacity to work together to provide a full range of provision. They questioned the impact upon placement and services from staff shortages, low incidence of an impairment, race, age, gender, rurality, and the existence of separate provision. They also wished to know to what degree services aimed to move people from restrictive provision, how they balanced direct and indirect support, and how they defined who fell within categories used within the delivery of services. They questioned too whether it was the needs of policy, resource management, or the individual which drove support provision, and how provision was monitored and evaluated. There was a need to know how placement in separate provision was decided upon, what stopped it becoming a dumping ground for those difficult to situate elsewhere, and what gaps emerged at points of transition.

Moving on from the Continuum

The literature identified within this review used a wide range of discourses and many ways to describe provision. If one held to these discourses one would not find any points of

contact or reference. Thus the synthesis was an attempt to extract the quintessence of the different descriptions and then position this with similar descriptions and concepts so we could derive a categorical overview. In doing this we necessarily dislocated the descriptions from their context and the way in which they relate to other concepts within that context and within the parameters of that discourse. Thus, although we may have got at the quintessence, and our synthetic categories and descriptions may be valid, yet we will have lost the different infrastructures. This can be seen as significant since these infrastructures, particularly in relation to special education, are often critical to understanding the descriptions which hang on them. Our intention however was to create a new way of framing our understanding, to construct a new infrastructure offering conceptual development beyond the level evidenced within the individual papers. It was apparent from this review that this development would have to recognise the complexity of the whole, its established and contradictory viewpoints and practices, its mix of discordancy and interconnectedness.

The notion of the continuum has been applied to a broad range of provision. There appear to be continua which are primarily concerned with where support takes place, frequently closely associated with another group of continua which are concerned with who receives the support. A third group are primarily concerned with who is providing the support, where they operate, their values and workload. These link closely to continua which are concerned with the quantity of support and type of service providing it and continua which focus upon quality of support and how that is developed and reinforced. Finally there appears to be a group of continua which focus upon issues of governance, the nature of programmes, policy and rules and movement within the system.

In Table 8 we summarise the types of continuum which were in evidence from this search and place them into 6 categories of continua: Continua of space; continua of staffing; continua of students; continua of support; continua of strategies; and continua of systems.

Norwich (2008) suggests that in responding to the challenges of identifying children with special educational needs - where they will be placed for learning, the curriculum they will follow and the governance over decisions about provision - we need to conceive effective provision as requiring more than one continuum. He identifies five flexible interacting continua relating to identification, participation, placement, curriculum/teaching and governance but recognises that no single continuum can operate in isolation. It requires all parts to be working together. This review has identified the plethora of additional continua which could also be applied and the tensions they can create within the international policy frame of inclusion. That is not to suggest that this review covers all the possible constructs either. Two additional continua were identified, for example, during discussions with the NCSE advisory group, who were surprised that there were not a continuum of attitudes (running from the medical model perspective to the social model perspective) nor of practitioner qualification (running perhaps from highly specialised to highly generalised, or highly qualified to unqualified). It seems likely that other constructs are available which this review has not covered, too. It was evident for example that parents were rarely in evidence within the literature, being situated as service users, as choice makers and as models for naturalistic interactions. There was not however a continuum of parental capacity to gain access to networks and resources. There is also a widely recognised disparity around the identification, level of provision and equitable treatment of a range of groupings within many countries, particularly associated with ethnicity, class and gender (e.g.

UK -DCSF, 2009 & US - Connor & Ferri, 2007), yet there was no continuum of marginalisation in evidence.

The research team were increasingly aware of the gaps which emerged in the range of conceptualisations of the continuum, and the manner in which each singular continuum encouraged a simplified view of the issues which existed within the continuum being described. Can we exclude these other continua when we are creating a frame for considering provision for children and young people? And can we ignore the oversimplification and the negative associations which accompany the concept? And if we have multiple continua how are they woven together? If we regard them as a series of individual threads do we not increase the chance that our focus opens up gaps between them through which people will continue to fall or through which people fear to fall? The reconceptualisation which Taylor (1988, 2001) and Nisbet (2004) recommend needs to drive change.

It has also been noticeable across this review that the continuum encourages a focus upon the individual, yet aspires to provide services which work in a collective manner. It is frequently framed as encapsulating provision for all at one end and provision for a select few at the other. It needs to represent shifts in thinking, to describe complex systems, capturing their multi-layered, interconnected nature, engaging with multiple perspectives and offering a platform for flexible, non-linear thinking and for multi-dimensional responses. It needs to be a concept that recognises the context in most countries, where the spirit of legislation is towards inclusion, where the pre-established systems represent a range of public, professional and political communities, where the direction of travel reflects shifting views and complex experiences.

Since it is beyond the scope of the continuum to encourage such a non-linear, multi-dimensional understanding, we need to establish a new metaphor which can achieve this. How

we understand the world, how we think and act, are fundamentally bound up with metaphor. As Lakoff & Johnson (1980) recognised, they bring about associations which both structure and focus our thinking upon particular aspects of experience. They can be the means by which we coherently understand an experience. Through their associations they can guide our future actions. By making experience coherent, hiding some features and highlighting others, metaphors can function in a self-fulfilling cycle, creating “truth”.

The authors would suggest that a community of provision would be a better metaphor to encapsulate complex societal support systems. Whereas the notion of a continuum is constrained and defined by its linear, finite nature, the notion of the community is defined by the interweaving characteristics, resources, groupings and priorities of its members. Its internal and external boundaries can be both porous and restrictive; its shape is context dependent and its relationships tenuous. It carries with it a sense of an ideal, but also a warning of insularity, serving to remind its members that they can both welcome and marginalise others from inside and outside the community.

Situating the use of Community

Bettez & Hytten, (2013) discuss the popularity of community as a concept within education, highlighting the tendency to talk about it in a superficial and idealised way, seeing it almost as a panacea. For example, in a book which details a great many processes of oppression, bell hooks (1994) invokes community to describe what a teacher should strive for:

- a climate of openness
- intellectual rigour
- shared commitment
- a common good

- recognition of each individual voice

Bettez & Hytten suggest that not enough consideration has been given to what it means to share community with others where goals are loosely overlapping, where people are frequently excluded and sustainability is an inevitable challenge.

Despite all the talk about the importance of community, we know that working with others is never as easy as it sometimes sounds. There are always challenges, barriers, and roadblocks in our efforts to collaborate, especially across lines of difference.

(p53)

They point to a range of authors who have called for use of the idea of community to be curtailed. The challenge they suggest is that community is viewed as being static, representing sameness and unity, when views of community need to be more critical and nuanced recognising it as complex and as an ongoing process. This reflects a tradition in the literature which recognises communities as variable, permeable, hard to pin down and mired in the complexity of social contexts (Philip, Way, Garcia, Schuler-Brown, & Navarro , 2013). Given this ambiguity, Philip et al ask why this term should “remain such a powerful construct in research and practice” (p175)? They conclude that it links individuals and institutions; it is at the root of many experiences of social inequality and yet can stir people to action.

The use of the *community* gained popularity during the same period as the term *continuum*. It was generally used to conceptualise the nature of participation within wider social structures as opposed to the separation of services and individuals. From the outset its use was questioned, however, particularly because of people’s tendency to romanticise community. It was also suggested that formal and informal institutions and social structures in which social relations emerge may have little in common (Stacey, 1969). By the 1970s, community was frequently

being defined by social networks rather than spatial boundaries. A challenge in using notions of location is that having resources in common does not equate to interpersonal networks or commonality of interests. It may miss significant points of interaction and create a false set of priorities. This is less likely to occur with a focus upon the social linkages and flows of resources within social networks (Wellman & Leighton, 1979).

Early reviews of the literature suggested that communities can be defined through four elements; membership or sense of belonging; influence or sense of mattering; integration and fulfilment of needs; and shared emotional connection or common places, histories and experience (Mcmillan & George, 1986). It was also suggested that community was used miscellaneously in reference to neighborhoods, professional organisations, religious groups or groups of countries, referring to populations of varying size and diverse social systems, involving self-identification and being defined by a range of structural and functional characteristics (Garcia, Giuliani & Wiesenfeld, 1999).

This last review identified that *sense of* community is used to define a community but is also a process in the development of community. They noted the role played by emotional security, belonging and identification, personal investment and a system of shared symbols in establishing and maintaining membership of a community. They also pointed to a capacity to influence or be influenced by others, to integrate and satisfy individual and collective needs, and to share emotional connections. The idea of these relationships can be enough to engage people within a community. Groups of people who have little knowledge of each other can be bonded to others within an *imagined community* (Anderson, 1991), including through future relationships or those which lie beyond their local experience. Such communities are still interwoven with ideology and hegemony however (Kanno & Norton, 2009). Anderson's original study, for example

demonstrated how colonial national identity was reified by imperial states through their creation of the map, the census and the museum. As a consequence of their approaches they defined the nature of the human beings they ruled, the geography of their territory and legitimated its ancestry.

The long history of community within educational discourse underlines its relevance to many. Pardales & Girod note its prevalence (2006) in their study of the community of inquiry, mentioning amongst others the learning community (Peterson, 1992) and classroom community (Bridges, 1995). Its wide use was also evident in our searches. Amongst the literature we identified: a community of knowledge (Welbourne, 1981) ; an occupational community (Van Maanen & Barley, 1982); a democratic and ethically-based community (Giroux & McLaren, 1986); a community of leaders (Barth, 1987); community of self-reliance (Novak, 1990); an interpretive community (Fish, in Brown 1994); a community of discourse (Brown, 1994); a community of common interest (Robinson, 1994); a community of knowledgeability (Robinson, 1994); virtual communities (Hill, Stead, Rosenstein, & Furnas, 1995); mythical communities of common identities and interests (Bernstein, 2000). a community of classrooms and communities of teachers (Cruz, Gilbert, Harvey, Snowwhite, Ybarra, Hudson, Cox, Ybarra-Garcia & Boatsman, 2003); and a community of profession (Goode & Goode, 2013). This is not the place for an extensive examination of these concepts, but it both demonstrates the breadth of issues which have been described within the community frame and the potential resource for reflection upon the nature of the component parts within a community of provision.

A Broad Definition of a Community of Provision

We broadly define a community of provision as the settings and services which work together to provide learning and support for all children and young people within their locality.

This is not a reversion to the old model of geographical location, but recognises the current delivery of education, health and care services and the formal relationships between them. It creates space to reflect upon the linkages and flows of resources within social groupings. The use of an active verb ‘work together’, indicates the ongoing nature of the process and allows consideration of informal connections.

The inter-related weave of continua identified within this review can be reframed as a connected whole to produce six overarching community perspectives:

Community space: concerned with where support takes place

Community staffing: concerned with who is providing the support

Community of students: concerned with who is being supported

Community support: concerned with the quantity and type of support

Community strategies: concerned with the quality of support

Community systems: concerned with issues of governance

This not only draws together the broad scope of issues already identified in relation to special education but would also offer opportunities to draw upon the wide range of conceptual tools associated with the development of community identities and cohesion. These perspectives should not be seen in isolation from any other part of the overall community. They are the means by which provision is described but they are also the means by which it is delivered. They do not contain a singular grouping or separate contained aspect of provision. For example the experience and involvement of parents could be evident in all six perspectives as could that of a particular school, support service or funding body.

Given the plethora of visual representations of the continua the authors would cautiously offer the following images of a community of provision, building upon the categories which

have emerged in this review. We provide four images; two which represent the focused, aspirational nature of a community (Figure 1a & 2a) and two which represents the diffuse and separate experience which our categorical worldview brings (Figure 1b & 2b).

Both represent the community of provision at a given moment and both represent opportunities and challenges. They can also represent different levels of the system and in different locations, requiring different relationships to be established. The appropriate complete image would be three dimensional with overlapping communal clusters, however the three dimensions would not be defined as a pyramid or square or tube but would by necessity be open sided (Figures 2a & 2b).

When looking at the representation we need to be aware that the groupings involved will have a series of other goals and processes, and that this community will ultimately be defined by the network of agreements outlining the nature and extent of its relationships, both formal and informal. Its identity will also be dependent upon its relationship with the many other professional, political, social and cultural communities which exist around it and its techniques and capacity to maintain relationships and understanding with those other communities.

We must be wary when using these representations to describe actual provision, as the idealised, aspirational, version will easily hide the multifarious problems inherent within nearly all communities. We must always recognise that a fundamental part of communities is their capacity to create, maintain and exacerbate negative experiences and to inspire resistance. Levels of participation or one's position relative to the margins can change across time and place, but they can be permanent state and can require one to deny aspects one's self. Communities are, for example, sites of loneliness (Pretty, Conroy, Dugay, Fowler, & Williams, 1996) and can reflect non-negotiable or historically situated processes of marginalization (Hodges, 1998), even if some

people come to prize and value their isolation (Brodsky, 1996). Anzaldua (1999) talks of cultural tyranny with ‘deviants’ identified because their actions are condemned by the dominant beliefs. She identifies how social conventions, rules and categories control relationships. The welfare of the individual comes to be less important than that of groups within the community. Such exposure to alienation inevitably leads to a desire to subvert or overcome its cause. Communities of resistance (Sivanandan, 1990¹) can emerge to challenge top-down approaches where knowledge is centrally controlled and shared and this can create within communities everyday experiences of non-hierarchical, locally-controlled struggle (Van Der Velden, 2004) .

Learning from other Community Models

In recent years two key models have emerged which have been associated with the notion of a community; *community of learners* (Rogoff, 1995; Rogoff, Eugene, & Cynthia, 1996) with an its underpinning belief that learning is a consequence of active participation in a community; and *community of practice* (Lave and Wenger, 1991), which can be seen as as informally bound groups of people, who share interests and expertise in free-flowing, creative ways (Wenger & Snyder, 2000). Both these models have been hugely influential but have come in for a range of criticisms. Two criticisms seem particularly salient at this point.

Firstly, the models are not situated within an analysis of issues of social inequality and their production or reproduction, nor do they begin with the instable, contradictory nature of practice (Eraut, 2002). However, schools can be seen as segregated communities with children and young people in self-segregated groups (Gibson 2003). This is not merely a process associated with issues of ‘the exasperated etc’ (Butler, 1990 p143), such as race, class, gender, sexuality, age, or

¹ The term was also used by Feminist theologian, Sharon Welch in 1985.

impairment, but one which cuts across all identities and attempts to understand and situate one's self. Connections and disconnections within a classroom cannot be explained simply through a notion of a singular community, as oppressive as the treatment of that singular community may be. An individual's personal history is situated within local and global discourses and these relations are constantly evolving. At the very least therefore, to be of use models which draw upon the notion of community need to practically articulate their unifying constructs in an unambiguous manner (Naraian, 2011).

Secondly, the notion of the community of practice and community of learners can be undermined by the need to define who is part of the group (Gee, 2005). For example, even if the members of an occupational community recognise each other, and know how to interpret and use information, practices may be different within that community. Over and above concerns about what realistically can be shared and what people are willing to share, when they communicate with another the same information will be interpreted through a different lens and the different practices which emerge cannot be simply explained (Duguid, 2005). Teachers, for instance, have to work with knowledge that has different status in different communities, and have the added complication that in some subject areas there may not be a broader consensual community (Seixas 1993). The role of resistance and challenge is seen to be underplayed in such models, as is the complexity of negotiating one's position and identity and the disinterest that some may have in being part of the community in which they are being expected to participate (Linehan & McCarthy, 2001). Partly as a result of this, the practices and that the shared values associated with a community may be too diffuse or too restrictive to include everyone (Strike, 1999).

The complex nature of such challenges cannot be reflected within the broad concept outlined above. This brief statement about the nature of a community of provision and the itemisation of

its parts acknowledges the complex and contradictory nature of social relations and services associated with learning, health and care, and it challenges the linear notion which situates, separates and constrains services and individuals. But there is also the need for a longer definition which more precisely reflects policy and practice ambitions, recognising issues of equity, marginalisation and participation such as those raised in relation to the community of practice and community of learners. Such a definition must serve as an aspirational model providing a tool for reflection and motivation in the face of the day to day challenges of any community of provision.

Developing a prescriptive, aspirational definition

Based upon this review, the current policy environment, and the overall research undertaken within the NCSE funded project, the aspirational definition of the community of provision, should aim to :

- recognise the interconnectedness of services
- recognise the need to structure service relationships
- acknowledge the significance of context
- encourage collaboration at all levels
- encapsulate the aspiration to be responsive to all needs

In order to minimise the risks associated with the notion of the community and the continuum, it should also aim to:

- challenge its own capacity to marginalise people
- challenge its own capacity to prioritise the values, wishes and needs of some at the expense of others.

Such aspirations need to be considered within a wider, critical understanding of the community in relation to education. For example, a community for Gatto (1992) is created through a dialectical free exchange of ideas which enables people to seek a better way of engaging with issues, involving localised solutions. He suggests that current education and the social structures of contemporary life encourage network connections rather than community. This only allows narrow association across a few common themes and creates a drain upon vitality. Connection between network members is therefore unsustained and partial. Taken in isolation some of the bullets above could be seen to encourage a network of provision. They would not encourage a shift away from such linear practices. They could simply justify a perpetuation of the challenges identified in relation to the continuum. They would also not necessarily encourage an engagement with the wider community, which critical theorists such as Gatto and Illich (1971) have seen as essential to disrupting the current dominant models of education. We do not need to be supporters of the more extreme deschooling views of Gatto and Illich, to see the importance of such issues. The function of this new metaphor is to shift the status quo. As Elliott (2009) noted in his critique of the notions of a dialogical community and singular community, a practical project which aims to facilitate social-justice and which is linked to a theory of community needs to clearly show how and where it can facilitate resistance which can function within democracy.

With these parameters in mind, the prescriptive, aspirational definition for a community of provision would be:

The collective delivery of services broadly related to learning, health and welfare involving a range of providers within a network of agreements. It is within this community of provision that support for children, families and practitioners is

negotiated, mediated and experienced. It is within this community that needs, challenges and opportunities arise and are met. The community of provision requires leadership which coheres and supports practices and strategies which emerge from and enhance collaborative working and planning. It aims, as a whole and within its constituent parts, for the community and organisational structures of each setting and service to be representative and inclusive of a full cross-section of their local communities in all aspects of their provision.

Four key clarifications are required for this broader definition to both clarify its meaning and to enable it to usefully serve as socially-just tool which can lay the foundation for practical actions.

- The community of provision would need to recognise that not everything can involve everybody and nor should it. The aim of representation and inclusion in all aspects of provision can be taken to mean that any provision which met the international definition of segregation (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2011) would not be representative (i.e. any setting in which children were separated in special provision for the largest part (80%) or more of the day.)
- Secondly, there is a need to specify what is meant by a local community. For reasons of transparency and practicality, we would advocate a geographical spread. There would need to be some flexibility around specificity in relation to rural and urban contexts and relative to the size of a setting. Since the community of provision is also defined by its network of agreements, this can be seen to create an additional ‘local community’. An underlying problem will be that membership of such a community within most administrations will be constrained by professional and administrative

boundaries and processes. A profound challenge for aspirational communities is how they can localise control, so that it reflects priorities of those it aims to serve and enables practitioners to meaningfully design services that reflect these priorities.

- Thirdly, clarification is needed around the notion of “inclusive”. This is taken to mean a context in which people participate alongside and with each other; the aim of a community of provision therefore is that a full cross section of the community can participate alongside and with each other within all community services and settings. The nature and quality of participation is partly resolved by the association with the international definition of segregation, however of itself it is open to diverse interpretations. We would suggest that the quality of participation can be assessed with some certainty on the basis of individuals’ own recognition of its effectiveness for them, and more tentatively can be surmised on the basis of individuals choosing to engage or showing levels of satisfaction on being engaged. This would, for example, offer a point of reflection both for the special education student in general education classes without sufficient support and the student within segregated provision who is overly supported. It would also apply to the capacity of different practitioners and family members to engage with the whole community or its constituent parts; and would provide a strong reminder to reflect upon - and confront - cultural and social aspects of services which can marginalise others within the community.
- Finally, the community of provision needs to be alert to the negotiation, mediation and experience of support and its ongoing creation of identities and relationships from all six overarching community perspectives. The community of provision requires a deliberate focus upon community priorities as evidenced in the actions associated with leadership

and participants; it should consider the forms that community leadership can take, how such roles can emerge and the degree to which they reflect the community's inclusive aspirations. This should facilitate an understanding of communication across the range of discourses which may be in operation as well as challenges which emerge in relation to community boundaries and the opportunities which emerge from engaging with resistance.

Using the Model of a Community of Provision

The model outlined above initially emerged from a study conducted in the context of Irish provision and the challenges and issues identified elsewhere within the research. This research enabled the researchers to situate the notion of the community of provision within a range of other recommendations. In examining the complex functioning of the components of the continuum in many countries (though they did not necessarily refer to it as a continuum) it was evident that many administrations recognised that a shift in provision required changing foci for funding, the development of trans-professionals able to link aspects of provision and areas of expertise, unifying governance structures and a shift in emphasis from individualised solutions to enhanced collective responses. We recognise that different jurisdictions will have different priorities and resources. Aims such as those identified here will inevitably be sought in varying ways and at vary rates. They will also have different implications for all services broadly related to learning, health and welfare depending upon their current size and operational systems. All systems are operating within a legacy of policies that constrain their capacity to respond.

It is perhaps inevitable that issues such as power, status and allegiance, multi-location and role mean that seeking an idealised concept of community will not necessarily produce the intended impact (Eraut 2002). As is evident with most popularised theory, the retheorisation of a

problem can be turned to serve the ends it originally aimed to disrupt. The concepts associated with communities of practice, for example, have come to be associated with management training, non-critical acceptance of the economically-correct narrative, and a tendency towards oversimplification and certainty, where earlier publications acknowledged limitations and the need for development (Barton & Trusting, 2005). It's ideas have been shown, for example, to reinforce the status quo in Aotearoa (New Zealand), serving government priorities and failing to reflect the historical and cultural organisation of established social networks (Bowl, 2011).

Despite warnings by Lave and Wenger (1991) against seeing schools as communities of practice (partly because many schooling processes do not match up with the situated learning perspective they advocate and partly because the experiences of learners and practices they engage with involve far wider communities) the model has been applied extensively within school settings.

It may be that the generality of such models means that when people put them into practice their ways of working do not converge and the lack of understanding of their theoretical roots means they do not understand how their actions can undermine the possibility of these processes (Brown, 1994). They may be constrained by the need to experiment, unlearn old ways and question accepted knowledge. There is inevitably some resistance in schools to fundamental change to established institutional and classroom relationships, learning goals and ways of working (Mitchell, 1999). It may also be questionable whether professional communities, particularly those which are insular, can improve practice through collective and reflective processes, given the selective, partial and contextualised nature of their discussions (Warren Little, 2003). Ultimately, many practitioners may not wish to engage in 'ceaseless struggles' (Betteney 2010 p96).

All this may be true, but humanity has also demonstrated a capacity to alter its structures.

Hope can be seen to reside in a growing shift away from tradition towards social reflection (Halpin, 1999). Such reflection needs to take a critical stance, however. It cannot be top down or bureaucratically guided, but must allow a diverse examination of who is privileged or harmed, legitimated or disqualified (Cannella & Lincoln, 2009) and the processes by which this occurs. It is within this context that theory can play a part, enabling the process of reflection upon the values and beliefs which underpin social inequality, injustice and their counterpoints. Theoretical ideas can provide the lenses for examining the complex social, historical and cultural weave of power, agency and discourse within which education is situated (Dagenais, 2009). Metaphors, in particular, have the capacity to change the way that people conceptualise and act in relation to social issues without necessarily being aware of their influence (Thibodeau & Boroditsky, 2011). In this context, the kinds of ideas discussed above, those which underpin our understanding of community, can support critical examination and influence everyday reflection upon the structures of special, inclusive and mainstream education in ways which are far beyond the reductionist, linear simplicity which is evident within conceptualisations of the continuum.

Conclusion

Within the wider study in which this review was situated, the complex challenges evident within the theoretical construction of the continuum were frequently identified in relation to provision found in many countries; provision which had been designed and managed in diverse political, historical and cultural contexts. The assertion of a new metaphor would not remove many of these concerns; however it can be used to provoke new thinking about possible futures, encouraging members of communities of provision to re-examine their practices in the context of their multifarious roles and relationships, deepening their understanding of our collective need

for support. Even those who critique community models do so with provisos such as: “The attractions of an emphasis on social context notwithstanding” (Linehan & McCarthy 2001).

It is not the intention of this paper to provide specific guidelines about how communities of provision should be practised. Beyond the principles which emerged from this review, such practices would need to be negotiated locally in an inclusive and representative manner.

Akkerman & Van Eijck (2013) suggest that we are operating within and across multiple social networks, social relations and diverse communities in a discontinuous manner, whilst maintaining (or striving to maintain) a singular, continuous, separate sense of self, acting as agents of negotiation across social systems which historically and culturally situated. The model we are proposing supports this reflection upon the multidimensionality of our formal and informal social arrangements and the interconnections between the children, young people and other adults with whom we interact. We would suggest that it will support practitioners in coming to understand the complex whole of provision and the inadequacy of linear and singular models of provision, support and development. It will not provide them with the answer but it will influence the questions they ask and the answers they seek.

The notion of the continuum is used to describe the space, students, staffing, support, strategies and systems associated with special education by practitioners, policy makers and theorists. Its underlying limitations are widely recognised however and the processes it aims to encapsulate have come to be understood as non-linear, complex and interwoven. The need for a reconceptualisation of how the delivery of services is represented is evident. The notion of the community of provision will enable practitioners, policy makers and theorists to explore the same key issues as the continuum but it will encourage new ways of thinking about these issues and about the collective challenge of delivering effective universal and support services.

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Table 1: Databases searched and number of identified papers

Database	Date searched	Number of records
AEI	17/01/11	51
ASSIA	17/01/11	249
BEI	17/01/11	10
BEI FC (Includes Education-line)	18/01/11	3
BLPC	18/01/11	97
Child Data	18/01/11	30
Dissertation and Theses	19/01/11	390
ECO	19/01/11	575
Education Research	19/01/11	165
Abstracts		
ERIC	18/01/11	826
Papers First	21/01/11	28
PsycInfo	21/01/11	426
Social Care Online	19/01/11	68
TOTAL NUMBER OF RECORDS		2918
Less identified duplicates		-464
Less identified as being from The Continuum International Publishing Group ²		-75
NUMBER OF RECORDS TO REVIEW		2379

² These were removed by the researcher conducting the search as they had been identified because of the name of the publishing company.

Table 2: Keyword terms for seeking literature associated with a Continuum:

1. Access to Education	20. MaladjustmentMental Health	38. Physical Disability
2. Additional educational needs	21. Mental Retardation	39. Hearing Impairment
3. Additional support	22. Moderate Learning Difficulties	40. Visual Impairment
4. Autism	23. Neurological Impairments	41. Emotional Disturbance
5. Behaviour Problems	24. Partial Hearing	42. Severe Emotional Disturbance
6. Blindness	25. Partial Vision	43. Moderate General Learning Disability
7. Cerebral Palsy	26. Perceptual Handicaps	44. Severe / Profound General Learning Disability
8. Deafness	27. Personality Problems	45. Autism / Autistic Spectrum Disorders
9. Disabilities	28. Reading Difficulties	46. Specific Speech and Language Disorder
10. Downs Syndrome	29. Special Education Teachers	47. Multiple disabilities
11. Dyscalculia	30. Special Schools	48. Continuum of services
12. Dysgraphia	31. Specialists	49. Continuum of provision
13. Dyslexia	32. Speech Handicaps	50. Continuum of education –
14. Hearing Impairments	33. Support Services	51. Literature reviews
15. Inclusion	34. Severe Learning Difficulties	
16. Inclusive education	35. Slow Learners	
17. Individual Needs	36. Special Classes	
18. Learning Difficulties	37. Special educational needs	
19. Learning Disabilities		

Table 3: The inclusion/exclusion criteria at Stage 1

Include if:	Exclude if:
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. it does involve education 2. it is to do with special education needs 3. it does include the term ‘continuum’ 4. the term continuum is linked to a physical or locational placement or to resource allocation 5. it is to do with provision or services 6. young people under 18 are included in the study 7. it is available electronically 8. it is available in English 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. it does not involve education 2. it is not to do with special education needs 3. it does not include the term ‘continuum’ 4. the term continuum is not linked to a physical or locational placement or to resource allocation 5. it is not to do with provision or services 6. no young people under 18 are included in the study 7. it is not available electronically 8. it is not available in English

Table 4: Papers excluded at Stage 1 on the basis of the agreed exclusion criteria

		File 1	File 2	File 3	File 4	Total
Criterion 1	Crite	252	488	208	346	1294
Criterion 2	Crite	64	14	109	0	187
Criterion 3	Crite	59	65	2	2	128
Criterion 4	Crite	65	18	193	6	282
Criterion 5	Crite	4	2	1	0	7
Criterion 6	Crite	1	0	15	0	16
Criterion 7	Crite	0	9	108	0	117
Criterion 8	Crite	0	0	0	0	0
Included	Inclu	100	37	190	14	341
Total	Tota	545	633	826	368	2372

Table 5: The inclusion criteria at Stage 2

Inclusion in Policy	Inclusion in Theory
A description of a policy or policy definition and/or a description of a response to policy and/or a description of what is being provided	Reflects upon the principles and operationalisation of the notion of a continuum (or part of a continuum)

Table 6: Number of papers in final synthesis on theory

	F	1
ile 1	0	
	F	7
ile 2		
	F	4
ile 3	5	
	F	1
ile 4		
	T	6
otal	3	

Table 7: Categories and number of concepts and sources arising from review

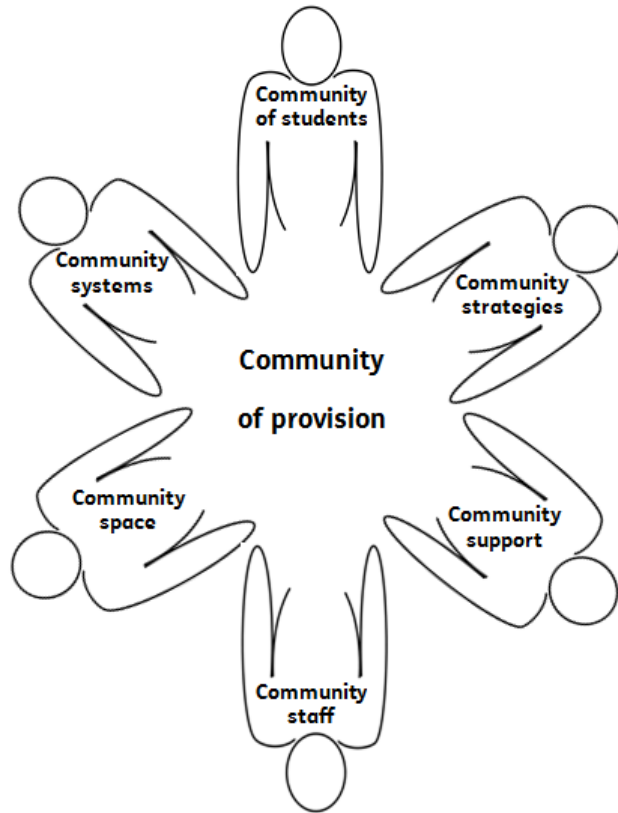
Category	Concepts	Sources
What is on the continuum	69	42
How we think about provision on the continuum	38	22
Aims for the continuum	13	4
Why there must be working together	18	11
How children are placed on the continuum	21	13
Challenges for the continuum	35	15

Table 8: The range of continua in evidence in the literature

<p>Continua of space <i>These continua are concerned with where support takes place.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuum of settings • Continuum of including and segregating provision • Continuum of a single setting • Continuum of age linked placements 	<p>Continua of staffing <i>These continua are concerned with who is providing the support</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuum of space and personnel • Continuum of practitioners • Continuum of diverse practitioner responses • Continuum of staff caseload
<p>Continua of students <i>These continua are concerned with who is being supported</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuum of need • Continuum of severity of need • Continuum of pupil type ratios 	<p>Continua of support <i>These continua are concerned with the quantity and type of support</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continuum of intensity of support Continuum of levels of response related to severity of identified need Continuum of intervention levels Continuum of intervention types Continuum of care Continuum of vocational support
<p>Continua of strategies <i>These continua are concerned with the quality of support</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuum of instruction • Continuum of assessment • Continuum of technology • Continuum of support for staff 	
<p>Continua of systems <i>These continua are concerned with issues of governance</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuum of programs • Continuum as a program • Continuum of in-school-community programs and services • Continuum of policy • Continuum of regulation • Continuum of transitions (through the system) • Continuum of variables (affecting how things work) • Continuum of areas of analysis (of policy and practice) 	

Figure 1a The community of provision is a focussed collection of practices, services, policies and individuals

Figure 1b The community of provision is an interconnected but diffuse collection of practices, services, policies and individuals



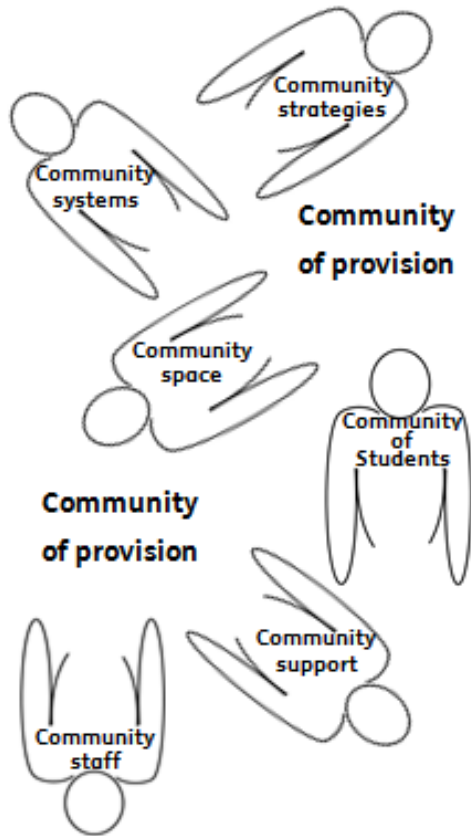


Figure 2a

The multidimensions, of focussed,
aspirational communities of provision

Figure 2b

The multidimensions of diffuse,
unreconstructed communities of provision

